Creation of Ombudsman for telecom sector

912. SHRI C. PERUMAL: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it has been proposed by Telecom Regulatory Authority of India to create an Ombudsman for telecom sector;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the details of the mechanism to address issues in the telecom sector without having to go to courts?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD) (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. TRAI in August 2004 had recommended for establishment an office of Ombudsman in the telecom sector to handle and investigate complaints within a time frame. The Government had not accepted the said recommendation after consideration.

(c) A well defined mechanism to address complaints/grievances from consumers of telecom sector exists in Department of Telecom (DoT) and Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) *i.e.* Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL), Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) which *inter-alia* includes Public Grievance Cell and holding of Telephone Adalats by public sector units. Instructions have been issued for two State grievance redressal mechanisms by private operators.

Rural tele-density

913. SHRI C. PERUMAL: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Telecom Regulatory Authority has submitted recommendations for augmenting rural tele-density;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether there is a huge mismatch between urban tele-density and rural tele-density; and

(d) if so, what action has been taken to correct the situation?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD) (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Telecom Regulatory Authority of India in October 2005 has given its recommendation on 'Growth of Telecom Services in Rural India'. A Brief on the recommendations is given in the Statement (*See* below).

(c) The urban tele-density is 31.25 and rural tele-density is 1.77 as on 30-09-2005.

(d) In order to increase the telecom coverage especially in the rural areas, Government is continuously striving to connect all villages in the country by telecom facility. Following steps have been planned to strengthen public and individual access in rural and remote areas:

(i) Provision of Village Public Telephones (VPTs) by November 2007 with the support from Universal Service Obligation Fund in 66,822 remaining unconnected villages excluding villages having less than 100 population, lying in thick forest area/Naxalite infected areas etc.

(ii) Provision of second VPT in the form of Rural Community Phones (RCPs) by 2007 in villages having population of more than 2,000 and having no PCO.

(iii) Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) has entered into agreement with service providers to provide Rural Phone Connectivity on demand in 1685 commercially unviable Short Distance Charging Areas (SDCAs) in their allocated areas by the first quarter of 2006.

Statement

Brief on Trai's Recommendations on Growth of Telecom Services In Rural India

The recommendations of TRAI provide for a higher quantitative and qualitative growth in telecom services in the country, particularly in rural areas. Since tele-density is interlinked with the level of development, the large differential between rural (1.94%) and urban tele-density (31.1%) cannot be sustainable. The recommendations state that without focus on rural areas, sizeable growth in telecom sector would not be possible.

As per the TRAI's recommendations, the present USO Policy of subsidizing individual DELs, VPTs, MARR replacement, PTICs/HPTICs would barely be able to achieve rural tele-density targets of 4% by 2010 even after giving huge subsidy support of around Rs. 30,000 crores.

Recommendations state that such low tele-density in rural areas in 2010 and high subsidies to achieve so little can not be acceptable therefore there is a need for a relook at traditional policies regarding the communication needs of rural areas and to change these to "Universal Service Opportunity" rather than a "Universal Service Obligation".

TRAI has further recognized so me features of the Indian rural market, *viz.* substantial purchasing power at the right price, expansion of broadband/ Internet service provided by private sector and the immense popularity of cable TV in India and that such connections are far in excess of fixed line telephones —a unique feature in the world. It recommends that the proposed policy should look at this feature and encourage triple - play networks which can be facilitated by Unified Licensing Regime, already recommended by the Authority to the Government.

The Authority has recommended that an alternative approach of facilitating network infrastructure expansion should be adopted. This approach proposes to offer financial incentives to service providers in the form of coverage of partial cost of shared infrastructure and license fee and spectrum charge reduction based on the number of rural base station locations. If the proposed scheme is implemented early then TRAI's experience of mobile growth in urban areas indicates that India would achieve rural tele-density of around 15% by December 2007 and this combined with expected urban tele-density of around 40% would take the overall tele-density to 22.96% easily meeting the target of 250 million subscribers set out by the Hon'ble Minister of Communications & IT. If the present USO Policy continues then TRAI expects that India would achieve rural tele-density of only around 3% by 2007 and and in order to achieve the subscriber base target of 250 million it would require an urban tele-density of 70% by December, 2007 which is too ambitious a target for urban areas and even if achieved would create a much larger rural/urban divide, which cannot be an acceptable policy.

TRAI has noted that there are already contractual commitments in the present USO policy. Accordingly it recommends that during the validity of these agreements both the schemes may work in parallel as there would be balances in USOF to fund both, but ultimately only the network infrastructure expansion approach should be followed for providing support from the USOF.

The salient features of TRAI's recommendations are as follows:—

- Sharing of infrastructure to receive support from USO.
- Supporting backbone infrastructure through USO fund
- Discount in Annual License Fee and Spectrum Charges linked with Rural Coverage
- Development of suitable applications
- Reduction of rural VSAT license fees and spectrum charges and provision of transponders at affordable rates.
- No right of way charges for networks in rural areas.
- Niche Operators to be supported from USOF and exemption from spectrum charges.
- No spectrum fees for usage of CorDECT and similar technologies in rural areas as well as for usage of 450 MHz.
- No prior SACFA clearance for deployment of towers upto 40 mt. in rural areas.
- Funds collected as part of Universal Access Levy (UAL) to be made available to USOF.

Indo-US cyber security

914. SHRI [illegible]
DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY:

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Department of IT has established a framework for information security in the country which would be steered by standardization testing and quality certification;

(b) whether there is a need to develop an information security policy directions/guidelines/standards, certification and accreditation mechanisms in line with global practices that are brought for our country;

(c) whether India and US had set up Indo-US cyber security forum to exchange news on cyber security; and

(d) if so, the steps being taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) As